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THE INFLUENCE OF MEMORY,

A

SERMON

PREACHED

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SERMON.

LUKE xvi : 25.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.

MEMORY is that power or susceptibility of the mind, by which we retain or recal the knowledge of the past. It implies not only a *present* perception of an object, but also a conviction that the same object has been previously perceived.

Among rational beings this power of the mind is universal. Not an individual can be found whose personal experience does not furnish an example.

Experience and observation, however, respect only the *present life*. An interesting question here arises,—Will memory exist in the *life which is to come*? Do reason and revelation sanction the doctrine, that the mind will retain its faculties, unimpaired, beyond the slumberings of the tomb?

To these inquiries, we are able to give a decided affirmative. The text evidently refers to the life which is to come. From it, we infer that the essential elements and

attributes of mind will remain the same forever. But Abraham said, "Son, *remember.*" *Memory* must *survive* the body.

From the expansive nature of mind, as apparent in this life, we may also infer that its powers in the future state will be greatly augmented. Other considerations suggest the same conclusion. For instance, in this life the mind suffers from its connection with the body. In the life to come, it will be unclogged, and unaffected by the diseases and accidents and "thousand ills which flesh is heir to." Indeed the whole system of christianity assumes it as an established principle, not only that mind will exist, but also that it will continue *active*, if not increasingly so, forever. The moment the mind ceases to exist, or ceases its operations, the *Bible* becomes a fable. Nothing can be more certain than that its Author professes to deal with beings that are to exist *forever*, and think and feel forever.

If such be the nature and operations of mind, sanctioned by reason and philosophy as well as by revealed religion, another most interesting and momentous inquiry arises,—What will be the *influence* of these operations upon our future condition ?

In the parable before us, we have one of the most striking illustrations of the point in question. Its design is to set forth the different conditions of different classes of men in the future life. The language is highly wrought, but the imagery employed, gives a vividness and a freshness of description which no literal language could reach. After an impressive notice of the different conditions of the righteous and the wicked in *this* life, our Savior proceeds, "And it came to pass, that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom ; the rich man also died, and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. *But Abraham said, Son, remember.*"

The passage selected as the theme of our meditations, suggests several important considerations. I shall however confine myself chiefly to the following :

The influence of memory upon the finally impenitent in the future world.

In illustrating this subject, I propose,

- I. *To notice some of the laws of memory ; and*
- II. *Show that the operation of these laws will necessarily render the finally impenitent miserable.*

I. The laws of memory.

Much has been written upon the faculties of the mind by philosophers of every age. Some have indulged largely in mere conjecture, and have advanced opinions at variance, at once, with reason and with facts. It is no part of *my* object to discuss the merits of opposing theories, nor even to notice many of the laws of memory which are regarded as *established*. I propose to call your attention only to a few ; and these the most simple, the most accordant with experience, and, either directly or indirectly assumed as established in the scriptures.

In the first place, *the mind must retain a recollection of much that is past.*

So intimately do we associate different objects that the occurrence of *one* to the mind, is unavoidably followed by the recollection of others. Sometimes a single incident will, in this way, revive a long train of thoughts which has previously exercised the mind. It is said of certain European soldiers, that, though long separated from the land of their birth, the strains of a single native air will instantly cause them to weep. The reason is obvious. Those strains are intimately *associated* with all that is sacred and thrilling in the endearments of home.

The influence of the same principle is visible in the common walks of life. Full well does the mourner know what recollections are awakened by the sound of a funeral knell or the sight of a funeral train.

I have said that the mind *must* retain a recollection of much that is past. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. Trains of *associated* thought are often involuntary; they are not under the control of the will. Even an effort

to forget only renders the case more hopeless, by fixing the object more indelibly in the mind.

In the second place ;—*The mind may recal ideas or events which have long been forgotten.*

By an effort, it is possible to recal incidents of which we may not have thought for a long series of years. This is often done when there is no effort. The principles of association as really affect events which exist far back in the past as events of yesterday. Thus the veteran will sometimes recount even the most trivial scenes of his childhood. He may do this when the whole history of his riper years is a blank,—when he cannot recollect passing events from one day, perhaps not from one hour to another. The inference then is reasonable, that no length of time, however great, renders it certain, that we may not recal any event of which we have ever had a knowledge.

But in the third place ;—*The mind will, eventually, recal all that is past.*

This principle has been maintained by the most eminent philosophers of the last and the present centuries. We are not hastily to decide that it is contrary to *reason*, because it *appears* to be contrary to experience. Many principles are universally admitted as true, which have no foundation in *present* experience.

But a little consideration will show that the principle in question is not wholly destitute of foundation even in experience. Some sudden *disease* has often awakened the recollection of ideas and incidents, long before entirely forgotten. Even the arrangement of words, and the distinction of sounds which it would be difficult for the strongest and most cultivated minds, under other circumstances, to retain, have been rehearsed with the utmost accuracy by persons of weak and undisciplined minds, when thus affected. Now it is plain that disease cannot *create* thought. It can only operate as an excitement to the intellectual faculties. In other words, it throws the mind into that peculiar attitude, which presents to its own eye, impressions long since received, and even existing, but, before, unnoticed.

So persons who have been rescued from the condition of drowning, have, in some instances, affirmed that the

operations of their minds were quickened to an astonishing degree. "The whole past life, with its thousand minute incidents seemed to pass before them, and to be viewed as in a mirror. Scenes and situations long gone by, and associates not seen for years, and perhaps buried, come rushing upon the mind in all the activity and distinctness of real existence."

But we are not confined to reason, nor philosophy, nor facts. The principle in question is clearly implied in the Bible. It is involved in the doctrine of a final judgment. "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness." "God shall judge the *secrets* of men." "God shall bring *every work* into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." "Every *idle word* that men shall speak they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all, and to *convince* all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have, ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Now if all these thoughts and feelings, words and actions,—secret and open, good and bad, are to pass thus in solemn review and be judged, it is of course implied that they will all be brought to remembrance. In the expressive language of inspiration, men will be "*convinced*" of these things.

In the fourth place;—*Memory becomes a source of pleasure or pain, according to the moral character of the ideas or actions which are recalled.*

In connection with the principle, that the mind will necessarily recall the past, it is worthy of notice, that it will, at the same time, most irresistibly *fasten* upon those particular thoughts or actions which are most manifestly wrong. The reasons are obvious. An individual may remember most distinctly guilty actions because they are most likely to awaken conscience, or because he fears detection, and consequently the loss of reputation or the infliction of the penalty of law.

Memory and conscience have a reciprocal influence. While a sense of guilt fixes the mind upon the guilty act,

the recollection of a guilty act has a tendency to arouse conscience. Thus memory is often a source of the keenest suffering. Many a man is made wretched by a simple recurrence to some crime of which others are unsuspecting. The criminal has often suffered indescribably more from this single source than from the dread even of a public execution. Could he forget his crime, he might be comparatively happy. But he must *think*. *Memory will* fasten on his deed of darkness.

On the other hand, memory is often a source of the greatest pleasure. Many an aged christian looks back with delight upon scenes of earlier years, and recounts, with feelings of the liveliest interest, the seasons of social or domestic joy,—the hours of sweet christian intercourse, the merciful deliverances, and the many incidents which, “like bright, sunny spots,” have cheered his pilgrimage homewards.

Such are some of the simple laws of memory. They are laws which reason, philosophy, and religion, alike regard as established, and, it may be added, which infidelity itself has never denied.

II. *The operation of these laws will necessarily render the finally impenitent miserable.*

It has been observed that the Bible everywhere assumes, that the essential attributes of mind will remain forever the same. The same laws which govern it here, will govern it hereafter,—with this difference,—*here*, they are often suspended or interrupted by disease, or some other cause arising from the connection of the mind with a frail and mortal body; hereafter, no such cause, and of course, no such effects will exist. The mind, at death, will be unfettered. There will be nothing to suspend, nothing to interrupt its operations. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that it will assume new vigor, and go on expanding and strengthening forever. If *memory* is a source of misery to the guilty when the mind is fettered and cramped by a mortal body, her power must be fearful indeed when all obstacles to thought are removed.

But let us examine this point more minutely.

In the first place ;—*Memory will compel the sinner to review a whole life of sin.*

In this life, a guilty man dreads the review of even a single criminal act. Sometimes we find one who would be willing to forget every thing else, if he could only blot from his recollection one deed of darkness.

So in the future life, the impenitent sinner would rather drop into annihilation, than be compelled continually to review the past. But his wishes and his efforts to forget will be alike unavailing. The laws of his mental constitution forbid him to forget a single act of rebellion against God. Objects will continually rise to view which will unavoidably prevent the torpor of memory. The distant view of heaven will, in itself, be sufficient to keep alive recollections of a Savior neglected,—of pardon refused, of warnings slighted.

It matters not how far distant in the past, every unholy act, every idle word, every sinful thought, must rise to view, and become the subject of solemn reflection. Those acts which the sinner will be most unwilling to remember, he will be the most unable to forget. They are recorded in the *darkest lines*.

But in the second place ;—*Memory will compel the sinner to look at sin in its TRUE LIGHT.*

In this world sin is regarded as a trifle. Impenitent men never estimate it in the light of God's character and law. The more blind they can render themselves to its guilt, the more daring they become. And thus they rush thoughtlessly on the very brink of ruin.

Were memory unfaithful to her trust, the sinner might remain ignorant of the nature of sin in the future world. But the laws of memory are *certain*. The sinner *cannot* forget. In eternity he must stop and reflect. The light which now pours upon his career of sin, leaves no room for mistake with regard to its real guilt. Sin now appears a sober reality. Hideous as its features may seem, there can be no escape from it. Upon it the sinner *must* gaze. Go where he will, *there it is*. Every act of transgression stands out in the clear light of eternity. *There it is*. Every eye may see. The pages of memory are unfolded. Its lines of darkness have now become bold and prominent

characters of living light. Even thoughts are visible. And every thought now appears an act.

Again, in the third place ;—*Memory will lead the sinner to condemn himself.*

This is sometimes the case even in this life. In fact *all* who see sin in its true light, condemn themselves. “Thus saith the Lord, ye shall remember your own evil ways, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.” “That thou mayst remember and be confounded and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame.” All who have sincerely repented of sin, have been prompt to condemn themselves. David, Peter, Paul, and many other scripture examples are in point.

But there is a self-condemnation very different from that of the sincere penitent. Witness the despairing confession and suicide of Judas. Witness the death-beds of Newport and Paine and others of like character. Such instances sometimes occur, though rarely till a dying hour. While in the vigor of health and the bustle of employment, very few, comparatively stop to estimate the nature and guilt of sin. Consequently they are left to the influence of erroneous views with regard to every thing spiritual. They see objects through a false and distorted medium. Not unfrequently, instead of the unequivocal language of self-abasement, you will hear them use that of self-complacency.

In eternity the case will be reversed. There, the clear and certain light of God’s character, will preclude any farther doubt with regard to the real nature of sin. With ten thousand acts of bold rebellion crowding upon his mind, the sinner’s mouth is stopped. His guilt stands out too boldly to be excused. So faithful is memory to her trust, that not a word of palliation is heard. He is “*convinced* of all his ungodly deeds.” He passes sentence upon himself. With a life of aggravated sin in view, he *feels* that misery is his desert. The severest strokes of justice he himself approves. When denied the small favor of one drop of water, he feels that it is just.

But there will be something more than self-condemnation.

In the fourth place ;—*Memory will awaken in the sinners bosom REMORSE.*

Remorse is the severe mental pain excited by a sense of guilt. Literally, it signifies a repeated or continual gnawing. In other words, it is the compunction of conscience, when roused by the recollections of the past.

In this life, the voice of conscience is so far hushed that cases of deep and settled remorse are rare. Some, such as those to which allusion has been made, do occur on a dying bed,—enough to teach us something of the nature of future misery. But though conscience is silenced here, in eternity she will rouse herself in all her fearful power, and speak her own language. She can be silenced no longer. She tells the whole tale of the sinner's career of impenitence, and every word "falls like thunder on the ear of woe." Opportunities neglected, a Savior slighted, and a thousand provoking and heaven-daring sins come rushing upon his memory with an overwhelming power. How will he accuse and reproach himself as he gazes on the distant glories of heaven! Once, he too might have secured an interest in the blood of the Lamb. Salvation, full and free, was urged upon him. Had he accepted, he might, even now, be mingling his voice in those sweetest songs—he might be bathing his spirit in the cool and crystal waters of life. But it is too late. Conviction, deep, despairing, has fastened upon him. Like the murderer, who is constantly affrighted by the spectre of his bleeding victim, he starts and shrinks at the creatures of his own imagination. Every object he sees—every sound he hears, reminds him of his rejection of a crucified Redeemer. And then, O then, *what* stings of conscience! What gnawings of remorse! "*A wounded spirit who can bear.*"

Finally ;—*Memory will preclude all hope of mitigation or end of misery.*

The remorse is as settled and hopeless as it is severe. Could the lost sinner, even for one hour, drown his senses in forgetfulness, there might be some mitigation. But no, memory—memory is "the worm that never dies." The recollections of rejected mercy, of insulted forbearance and the unchanging declarations of God's word, forbid the slightest hope. A slighted cross will haunt his imagination forever. Do what he will, go where he will, memory will still point, faithfully, to the cross. "Son, *remember.*"

The sinner *must* recollect. "Son, *remember.*" O the scenes that will be recalled! "*Remember.*" O might he forget! Could he but drop into annihilation! But this is impossible. *Thought* must burn on. The laws of memory fix irreversibly his doom. It is of no avail to call Abraham, father; nor to hear the recognition of that relation in reply. Here, in memory, is a gulf that can never, never be passed.

In this life, sleep or occupation with business may sometimes break the monotony of thought and alleviate misery. In the future there can be no sleep. Nor can there be the alleviation of even a moment of occupation. The sinner must spend an eternity in "*thinking, thinking, thinking,*" and *feeling, feeling, feeling.*

In view of this subject, we see,

1. *How vain are the objections urged against the doctrine of future misery.*

Some ground objections in erroneous views in regard to the *judgment*. The doctrine of a future, formal distribution of rewards and punishments, say they, is nowhere taught in the Bible. The judgment is already past.

Now on the supposition that these views are correct, the objector gains nothing. There is no need of a formal judgment, nor of literal books, in order to ensure the misery of the finally impenitent sinner. The laws of his own constitution will furnish a "book of remembrance" equally to be dreaded.

Others object to the doctrine of future misery, because they are unable to determine the particular *locality* of the world of wo. "Where *is* hell?" is a question, frequently urged with an air of as much triumph, as if it was, itself, a demonstration that it had no existence.

It is easy to see that this objection might be urged upon the same grounds, and with equal force, against the doctrine of future happiness. But, admitting, for a moment, that there is no *place* of future punishment, nothing is gained to the objector. The doctrine of future misery does not turn upon the question of mere locality.

"The mind is its own place, and, in itself,
Can make a hell."—

The sinner carries, in his own bosom, the elements of wo. Heaven itself, if a place, would be no refuge.

“Which way he flies is hell,
Himself is hell.”

But perhaps the most common objection to future misery is grounded in erroneous views of God's *benevolence*. “God is too benevolent to make men miserable hereafter.”

Now whether this view of benevolence be correct or not, the objector gains nothing. The laws of mind are fixed. The *guilty* man is an unhappy man even here; not because God takes delight in his unhappiness, but because he has violated the established laws of conscience.

So with the man who dies in his sins. He has violated laws which just as certainly ensure his misery, as he who violates the laws which govern fire, is burned. God takes no pleasure in his destruction. He has endowed him with a mind free and immortal, and left him to fill up his own book of remembrance. And, at last, after hearing his account of himself, he will say, “*Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.*”

Is it said here that, in the future life, the benevolence of God will counteract the unhappy influence of these laws? But why does not his benevolence counteract it in this life? Why cannot the guilty here be as peaceful and as happy as the innocent? Is it because God loves some better than others? Certainly not. He is towards all, the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever—always infinitely and unchangeably benevolent. And yet the guilty man is often so wretched that he even seeks death with the vain hope that annihilation will follow.

There is then no resort, except to the assertion, that, at death, the laws of memory cease their operations. But this assertion, if true, proved too much. It robs heaven of its joys. The whole song of the redeemed is but a recital of what is past. The constant recollection of the mercy of God, in providing a Savior, and leading to timely repentance and faith, gives it its peculiar sweetness, and renders it ever “new.”

Thus the objection which sweeps away a hell, would also sweep away a heaven. That which annihilates future misery, annihilates future bliss.

2. This subject teaches us, *that the misery of those who finally perish must be unspeakably dreadful.*

No suffering, even in this life, is so dreadful as that occasioned by the stings of an insulted and enraged conscience, when roused by the recollections of past guilt. How many have pined away and died under her tortures! Sometimes you may hear the commencement of those wailings which are never to end. Conscience, "like the dying taper, which, before it expires, gives a brighter blaze," starts up and flashes conviction upon the stupid soul, which even here, kindles the fires that never die. "You tell me," said a dying man to his infidel companions, "you tell me there is *no hell!* *I feel it in my bosom already.*" "Oh," said another, "Oh for insanity—for any thing to quell *memory*, the never-dying worm that feeds on my heart!"

Such, sometimes, is the influence of memory *in this life*. But oh, who can estimate her power beyond the tomb! where the mind is untrammelled—where a whole life of sin and impenitence becomes the subject of solemn reflection! All that can be felt here, is only a slight foretaste of what lies beyond. There, unlike the taper, whose expiring blaze soon goes out in darkness, conscience burns on with ever increasing and more insufferable brightness forever. There the sinner must submit to her fearful sovereignty. There he must forever think, and every thought will be lightening.

This subject teaches us, in conclusion, *that an immortal mind is a fearful possession.*

This appears from the imperishable nature of thought. When we commence our moral existence, we commence a record, which is to be perused and re-perused forever. The characters which we trace, may now be invisible, but, like those in sympathetic ink, the future will bring them all to view. Memory, memory is "eternity's text-book."

But the fearfulness of such a possession does not appear in the immortality of thought alone. The mind, even here, may contain the elements of its own future misery.

You need do nothing more to render multitudes miserable, *in this life*, than to confine their thoughts upon death, eternity and kindred subjects. To them, silent and unceasing reflection, is only another name for wretchedness. A shuddering of spirit, deep, dark and indescribable, is the certain result of a review of the past in its bearings upon the future. Hence it is, that men seek to silence the cries of conscience. The pleasures of the world, the refuges of error, the intoxicating bowl, and a nameless variety of means, are employed to interrupt the startling process of thought.

Now this indescribable state of feeling is only an *earnest* of what is to come. It is the secret stirring of the *elements* of future misery. It is an immortal mind, struggling with the consciousness of guilt on the silent shore of vast eternity.

Need it then be added that impenitent men are already prepared for destruction? Only sever the slender thread of life, and *thought* can be prevented no longer. Let them only take the single "step" which is between them and death, and they are where memory and conscience will summon all their energies, and commence their everlasting employments—where the last glimmerings of hope give place to the blackness of despair.

Sometimes, the elements of future wo become, in this life, too wild for the control even of the strongest minds. An eminent statesman has furnished us with a striking example. Though possessed of uncommon intellectual strength, a review of a life of sin from his dying bed was too much for him. When questioned in relation to his feelings, his reply, in tones of agony, was simply, "*remorse—remorse.*" And when his voice was silenced, and his limbs were stiffening, he made another effort to express the hopelessness of his misery, by motioning for a card, and tracing, with his hand quivering in death, the same significant word, "*remorse—remorse.*"

"So withers the mind *remorse* hath riven,
Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven,
Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it *death.*"

My impenitent hearers, permit me to ask, what you have committed to the record-book of memory? Are your present thoughts, is your present conduct such as you are willing to spend an eternity in reviewing? Better far had no ray of intelligence ever lighted up your eye—better had the vacant idiot's glare been the only exhibition of your undying nature—nay, better had you never been born, than that you should venture into the presence of God in your present condition. Rest assured that “your sins will find you out.” Every thing will pass in solemn review. You will remember this Sabbath. You will remember this sermon—these admonitions. As then you dread an eternity of uninterrupted reflection, stain not another page with the dark record of sin. Fill up what remains with thoughts and deeds which are worthy of an immortal mind.